

Creating and Maintaining Successful Partnerships

Public Safety and Enhanced Quality of Life through Community Partnerships

No local crime or public safety problem can be solved without the help of those who live and work in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods. The quality of life in any community is largely determined by its residents, who can partner with law enforcement to improve it. These collaborative efforts to solve and prevent problems by identifying the root causes form one of the key tenets of community policing.

In addition to improving public safety and order, collaboration can help law enforcement better understand community needs, enabling more targeted policing strategies and efficient use of resources. It can also lead to mutual understanding and respect, which in turn can increase community cooperation and support for law enforcement. In short, community partnerships not only solve problems but also increase public trust and generate good will.

Key Ingredients of a Successful Partnership

Today, most law enforcement agencies practice community partnerships in some way. Short-term projects, town hall meetings, and other forms of interaction are important, but ongoing partnerships structured to achieve well-defined objectives are most effective in producing sustainable benefits. To achieve results, they must be supported by committed groups of stakeholders who have a vested interest in the collaboration, a shared vision, the ability to work as a team, and the means to identify problems and help design responses.

Membership. Critical to the success of any partnership is its membership. Participants should be drawn from a wide variety of sources including health and social services, government, the courts, faith groups, business owners, and residents. Schools, which are interested in working with police and parents to improve student safety, are also likely partners.

Business organizations can help maintain order in the commercial districts or fund community programs. These and other public-private partnerships can be especially valuable. By some estimates, as much as 85 per cent of the nation's critical infrastructure is protected by private security.¹ Partnering with a security agency, for instance, can reduce demands on local law enforcement resources while increasing the agency's ability to prevent and respond to crime. Our communities can benefit from law

¹ Ohlhausen Research, Inc., *National Policy Summit: Building Private Security/Public Policing Partnerships to Prevent and Respond to Terrorism and Public Disorder* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2004), <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0704-pub.pdf>.

enforcement agencies reaching out to their counterparts in security, public health, education, and other organizations.

It is important to achieve balance among participants as well, by including organizations and community representatives that will provide a diverse discussion of the issues being addressed. Many successful partnerships also invite anticipated critics of the efforts in order to address those perspectives from the outset.

Shared Goals and Trust. A solid working partnership requires organization and an action plan based on thoughtful intelligence gathering and realistic goals. It also requires leadership by members who have the authority to make important decisions about resources, strategies, and other aspects of the plan. A structured process with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes will ensure that all parties are on the same page. Moreover, program objectives must be clearly defined as should the rationale for any activities, resources, communications, or other actions defined by the plan.

But the key ingredient to any successful partnership is trust, which requires open and honest communication. This means that all partners have opportunities to share their ideas, and that a climate of respect is created in which people feel comfortable doing so.

Commitment. A successful partnership requires dedication and commitment from its participants. Partners must believe strongly in the mission of the group and prioritize their participation in the project. It is now a common practice for public safety groups to develop mission, vision, and values statements, as are often found in the corporate world. Such statements can induce, or enhance commitment from group members, especially when they are developed with the aid of a skilled leadership trainer.

Organization. Structure is very important to multi-disciplinary, long-term projects. When different organizations work together for long periods of time on serious problems, it is possible for inefficiencies to develop, and for individual members to become lost or distracted. Organization refers to the need for strategic planning, for a written description of the goals, objectives, methods, activities, responsibilities, schedules, resources, and anticipated contingencies relating to the project. Like a mission or vision statement, this plan may change over time, and should be revisited periodically by the group to assess progress, hold each other accountable, solve problems, and generally keep things on track. Without a plan, resources are likely to be wasted, some participants will lose interest, and some efforts will falter or fail.

Learn More

Public Safety Clearinghouse of the National Public Safety Partnership

The Public Safety Clearinghouse is an online tool for finding and sharing violence reduction resources. Designed to leverage the lessons learned and resources from all DOJ components, the Clearinghouse offers training, technical assistance, publications, lessons learned, and evidence based strategies.

<https://www.nationalpublicsafetypartnership.org/clearinghouse>

Violence Reduction Assessment Tool (VRAT)

Criminal justice research over the last several decades has revealed two key findings: 1) Communities can reduce crime and violence through data-driven processes and evidence-based strategies; and 2) Effective implementation of these processes and strategies is central to crime reduction. The difference between effective and ineffective implementation centers on several key dimensions. These include governance and project management, partnerships, and reliable, accurate and current data and analysis. The **VRAT** is a planning, resource and support instrument that assists communities in assessing their capacity for effective implementation and identifying concrete action steps to increase capacity and maximize the likelihood of effective implementation. VRAT is a flexible support tool that can assist communities in developing both the commitment and the competence to successfully address crime and violence problems. <http://www.psnmsu.com/vrat/>

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